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VICTOR AMBROS

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U.S. SCIENTISTS WIN NOBEL MEDICINE PRIZE FOR DISCOVERY OF microRNA

Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun discovered microRNA, the tiny pieces of genetic material that alter how genes work at the cellular level

A NEW PRINCIPLE OF GENE REGULATION: JURY

Though each cell in our body has the same set of instructions, called DNA, some turn into brain cells, while others become muscles. That's because microRNAs regulate genes at cellular level, acting as a switch that turns genes off or on. "Their groundbreaking discovery revealed a new principle of gene regulation essential for multicellular organisms," the jury said

PROMISING WEAPON IN FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

- Ambros and Ruvkun discovered microRNAs during their study on two mutant strains of worms. The study's results were published in 1993
- As microRNAs allow us to control the behaviour of genes, they could help in treating various diseases. In cancer patients, they can be used to cause the mutated gene in the cancer cells to stop its activities | P14

Dec 10

WHEN NOBEL LAUREATES ARE INVITED TO RECEIVE THEIR AWARDS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

India extends $400 mn assistance to Maldives, signs a slew of pacts

₹3,000 cr currency swap deal to address forex shortage; RuPay card launched in Malé

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

INDIA on Monday took a major step in healing the strained ties with the Maldives by enhancing its development assistance to the cash-strapped nation and signing a slew of pacts, including a ₹3,000 crore currency swap agreement.

After the bilateral talks with the visiting Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a $400 million support to the island nation to overcome its financial challenges.

Announcing the details, the Reserve Bank of India said it has entered into a currency swap agreement with the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) under the SAARC Currency Swap Framework 2024-27. Under the pact, the MMA is eligible for financing support from the RBI amounting to $400 million under the US Dollar/Euro Swap Window and ₹3,000 crore under the INR Swap Window. The agreement would be valid till June 18, 2027.

PM Narendra Modi and Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu virtually inaugurate the new runway at the Hanimaadhoo Int'l Airport, at Hyderabad House in New Delhi | PTI

The SAARC currency swap framework is designed to offer short-term foreign exchange liquidity to member countries experiencing balance of payments stress or foreign exchange shortages. It serves as a temporary solution until more permanent financing arrangements can be made.

The bilateral meet saw the signing of several pacts, including the launch of RuPay card in the Maldives and enhancing the relationship between the two nations to a Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership.

Modi and Muizzu virtually inaugurated the new runway at the Hanimadhoo International airport and witnessed a live transaction using a RuPay payment service card in the Maldives. The airport's redevelopment under Indian Line of Credit of $132 million aims to provide complete new infrastructure including ATC tower, hangar, cargo facilities, and passenger terminal building.

The two leaders agreed to bolster bilateral ties that had hit a rocky patch last year after some Maldivian ministers tried to fan anti-India sentiments.

Stressing India's historic relations with the Maldives, Modi said New Delhi has supported Malé in times of crisis. "India has always been the first responder for Maldives whether it was essential commodities or vaccines," he added.

Muizzu thanked India for the assistance. "We hope to welcome more Indian tourists to Maldives," he said.

Cabinet will decide on caste census report on October 18, says Siddu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AMID the growing demand from leaders of Backward Classes (BC) to implement the socio-economic and educational survey report, popularly known as caste census, Chief Minister **Siddaramaiah** on Monday said that a decision on implementing it will be taken after discussion at the cabinet meeting on October 18.

After a meeting with ministers, legislators and leaders from Backward Classes, Siddaramaiah told reporters that Karnataka is the first state in the country to conduct such a survey during his first tenure as chief minister (2013 to 2018). The survey report was submitted to the state government in February. But the CM said he has not gone through the report.

The report, prepared by the H Kantharaj Commission, is not just about Backward Classes, but it has covered all seven crore people of the state, the CM said. Legislators and leaders from BC communities have urged him to implement the recommendations of the report, he added.

Siddaramaiah said that during his first tenure as CM, the commission conducted a detailed survey, but its report was not ready then. It was completed when HD Kumaraswamy was chief minister, but he refused to accept it. Later, the BJP government too did not accept the report. "We will take an appropriate decision after discussing it at the cabinet meeting," he added. But sources said that even after cabinet discussion, a cabinet sub-committee is likely to be formed to look into the report and give its recommendations. On Monday, a delegation of around 30 leaders, including ministers, MLAs, MLCs, and former chairman of the State Backward Classes Commission CS Dwarkanath, met the chief minister. P4

IN RAMANAGARA

50-year-old woman dies after live wire falls on her

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A 50-year-old woman died on the spot after a high voltage 11kV wire snapped and fell on her around 10am on Monday at Chikkanahalli in Tavarekere police limits of Ramanagara district.

Enraged by this, people of Chikkanahalli staged a protest demanding that action be taken against BESCOM officials.

Manjamma was talking to two women on the road in front of her house when the live wire fell on her. The other women escaped narrowly. One of them tried to help Manjamma, but she was pushed away by a villager.

"Due to the flashover of the pin insulator, the high-voltage wire snapped and fell on the woman. Her kin Shivaram has filed a complaint. A case of death due to negligence has been registered against local BESCOM officials," a police officer said.

Nelamangala MLA N Sreenivasaiah, who visited Chikkanahalli, persuaded the villagers to withdraw their protest, stating that he would take up the matter with BESCOM officials. The body was sent to Rajarajeshwari Hospital for postmortem.

BESCOM officials, however, refused to comment, stating that they are waiting for a report from the electrical inspectorate and the postmortem report. On November 19, 2023, Soundarya, 23, and her nine-month-old daughter Suviksha of Kadugodi were charred to death at Hope Farm in Whitefield after a live wire fell on them. Five BESCOM officials were suspended in this connection. Kadugodi police had arrested the officials for negligence. However, they were released on bail within hours of their arrest.

RUSTED LIGHT POLES BIG RISK: P5

M'luru bizman's body found in river, 6 booked

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mangaluru

THE body of **BM Mumtaz Ali**, brother of former MLA Mohiuddin Bava, was found in the Phalguni river at Kulur near here on Monday morning.

Based on complaints from his family members, extortion and abetment to suicide cases have been registered against Rahmat 38, Abdul Sattar, Shafi, a sand merchant, Mustafa, Shoaib, and Siraj, driver of Sattar. "We have issued a lookout notice seeking information about these people," Mangaluru City Police Commissioner Anupam Agrawal told reporters.

Ali went missing on Sunday morning and his damaged BMW car was found near the bridge at Kulur.

Agrawal said Ali allegedly jumped into the river near the bridge around 4am on Sunday. "His body was recovered around 10am on Monday by a search team. We had formed six teams of experts from NDRF and SDRF and local divers. The body was handed over to Ali's family later in the day after postmortem," he added. P7

EXPRESS READ

34,863 posts need to be filled in timely way: CM

BENGALURU: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday mentioned that the 34,863 posts in various government departments that are lying vacant need to be filled up in a time-bound manner, by laying emphasis on those departments handling essential services | P4

Murugha Mutt seer gets bail in POCSO case

CHITRADURGA: A court here on Monday granted bail to Murugha Mutt seer Shivamurthy Murugha Sharanaru, following the completion of interrogation of witnesses in the sexual harassment case, lodged against him under the POCSO Act| P7

HAUNTING MEMORIES

Rotem gets a hug from her husband Yoav after a commemoration marking one year since the Hamas attacks on Israel, at the Coral Temple Synagogue in Bucharest, Romania, on Monday | AP

Security personnel stand outside a counting centre in Jammu, a day before counting of votes for Jammu & Kashmir Assembly polls on Monday | PTI

Parties brace for J&K, Haryana verdict today

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

WITH the counting of votes for Haryana and J&K assembly elections on Tuesday, the results would hold significance for all major players, coming as they do three months after the Modi government assumed office for the third consecutive term.

While Haryana witnessed the first direct contest between the BJP and the Congress after the Lok Sabha polls, the mood is upbeat in the grand old party as most of the exit polls predicted its smooth win. If the exit poll results are validated in Haryana, it will be a shot in the arm for the Congress and the INDIA bloc in the upcoming Maharashtra and Jharkhand elections.

The party is hoping to keep up the momentum of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where a resurgent Opposition INDIA bloc reduced the ruling BJP to 240 seats. For the Congress, victory in Haryana would indicate a strong support from the farmers and the Dalit community, which constitutes 20% of the state's population. However, a tussle for the chief minister's post can mar the glory of a Congress victory with former CM Bhupender Singh Hooda and his bete noire Kumari Selja vying for the top post.

Despite the exit poll results, the ruling BJP is confident of retaining power for a third term. Apart from the BJP and the Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, INLD-BSP and JJP-Azad Samaj Party are also in the fray.

In the keenly watched J&K polls, some pollsters have given an edge to the Congress-National Conference alliance while others predicted a hung assembly. These polls are the first since the abrogation of Article 370. While the BJP is hoping to form the government in 'Naya Kashmir' with the help of Independents, the Congress-NC alliance has also begun backchannel talks with other parties.

J&K saw the entry of a large number of Independents and smaller parties like the People's Conference, Apni Party and Awami Ittehad Party (AIP). The PDP, which severed its ties with the BJP in 2018, is hoping to emerge as a kingmaker. On Monday, NC president Farooq Abdullah said he will "accept PDP's support from the core of his heart". P12

5-year-old boy dies after eating stale food in city

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A five-year-old boy died after eating some stale food at his house on Monday. Food poisoning is suspected to be the reason for his death. The deceased has been identified as B Dheeraj of Bhuvaneshwari Nagar in KP Agrahara.

The boy's father Balaraj, 42, a food delivery agent, and mother Nagalakshmi, 35, a housewife, who also ate the food, are being treated in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of KIMS Hospital in VV Puram. They are said to be out of danger. They started vomiting and developed symptoms of diarrhea after eating the food. The couple hails from Tamil Nadu.

Balaraj, who initially claimed that they had a cake, later stated that they also had some food, including papad, according to hospital sources.

Balaraj, Nagalakshmi and Dheeraj were rushed to the hospital around 10 am. However, Dheeraj was declared brought dead. The reason for the boy's death will be known after getting the postmortem report on Tuesday, the sources said. "We will send the food items consumed by them for tests," S Girish, DCP (West), said.

Boy's grandmother Chamundeshwari told TNIE that she and her family members rushed to the hospital from their house in Kengeri after receiving a call around 9.30 am. "When I spoke to my son Balaraj in the hospital, he said they had rice for lunch on Sunday along with papad purchased from a fair price shop near their house. My son stated that he ate three papads, his wife two, and Dheeraj one. After some time, they experienced stomach pain, which they thought was normal. In the evening, they had a cake. After eating it, they felt stomach pain again.

CONTINUED ON P5

CHECKMATE

Global conflicts take the moolah out of the Amritsar chess industry

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

A bustling industry of chess kits with an international clientele is struggling due to global uncertainty following the Israel and Ukraine wars.

Before the wars broke, chess kit manufacturers in Amritsar sold goods worth about ₹20 crore, of which 75% was exported. Export orders are now down by 70-80%. Wooden chess kits are among the sought-after gift items during Christmas and New Year, yet there is little demand as of now.

"Though winter is our busiest season, most of us hardly have any orders," rues Rishi Sharma, a third generation manufacturer, who says his business took a 40% hit last year. He proudly claims he made a chess set for English business magnate Richard Branson in 2021.

Amritsar has a small but specialised industry of about 35 medium and small chess manufactures. They employ around 500 highly skilled artisans plus another 1,000 semi-skilled workers to make the wooden pieces and sets. It's a craft that has been passed from generation to generation.

The artisans take great pride in their artistry as they use simple implements to carve the exquisite pieces. For example, the carving of a knight itself takes 5-7 days. The cost of their chess kits ranges between ₹5,000 and ₹25,000 depending on the quality, design, material and craftsmanship.

"We were exporting to the US, Canada, the UK, Europe, Australia, Ukraine, Iran and Israel. But with inflation rising due to global uncertainty, our industry has been affected," says Sharma.

The cost of raw material and labour, too, have gone through the roof. Then there is the issue of obtaining a 'Vriksh Certificate' from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The certification process, started in 2018, takes 15-30 days to get as every minute detail of each *sheesham* tree, from where wood for the chess pieces are sourced, are to be recorded and shared.

"Due to these stringent rules restricting the sale of *sheesham*, the market share of wooden chess sets has declined sharply," says Sharma.

Surjit Singh Ahuja, another Amritsar-based exporter, says, "when a Netflix web series, *The Queen's Gambit* released in the UK in 2020, it was a worldwide hit and our sales went up manifold. The bounce continued till December 2022 before it tapered down."

IVORY TO RED SANDERS TO SHEESHAM

Before Independence, chess pieces were carved out of ivory. When ivory was banned, it was replaced with red sanders. When that too was prohibited, manufacturers shifted to *sheesham*. Now that *sheesham* is on the restricted list, chess pieces are made from Kikkar as well